

The Great Stories of the Early Church
58-Paul and Silas 09
What Did Paul Preach at Thessalonica?
Acts 17:1-9

Acts 17:1-9

- 1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:
- 2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,
- 3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.
- 4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.
- 5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.
- 6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;
- 7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.
- 8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.
- 9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. KJV

Introduction:

This story at first sounds like a report on a massive failure on the part of Paul and Silas and maybe even God. You will recall that last week we discussed why Paul and Silas passed by certain cities but stopped to minister at others and I affirmed to you that they were following the leadership of the Holy Spirit in selecting which cities to minister to and which to leave without a witness to the gospel.

Yet here, though they seemed to attract a small following of the Jews and a large following from among the believing Greeks, they were driven out by unbelieving Jews after only a short ministry. Sounds like the Holy Spirit got it wrong, no? But if you look forward in the New Testament to the writings of Paul you will find two letters to the church at Thessalonica. They had some problems, it is true, but they were a church. The ministry was a success but not in the same way that you and I might call success.

Listen to the opening words to them in Paul's first letter to this church.

1 Thess 1:1-8

- 1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace,

from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.
2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;
3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and
patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;
4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.
5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy
Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among
you for your sake.
6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in
much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:
7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.
8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and
Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that
we need not to speak any thing. KJV

Not only a church was established but a missionary church, a powerful church which served as an encouragement by example to the other churches of Macedonia and Greece.

The Lord The Holy Spirit accomplished exactly what He was intending even though the work of His men was cut short.

This might lead us to ask questions as to ‘why?’ but the answers to those questions are not give us and we will need to wait until we can interview the people involved in person to finally satisfy our curiosity about certain of the details of this matter.

The question that I do want to raise is one that I think we can answer if we think carefully concerning the revelation that we have been given.

What was it exactly that Paul preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica? We have only the barest outline of it recorded for us by Luke and even then the words seem odd and somewhat strange to our ears, “Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”

Several translators have made a run at making sense for us of these words.

Acts 17:3-4

3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, " This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."
NASU

Acts 17:3

3 opening and alleging that it behooved the Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom, (said he,) I proclaim unto you, is the Christ.
ASV

Acts 17:3

3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."

RSV

Acts 17:3

- 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. (from New International Version)

And, finally, the Amplified Bible.

Acts 17:2,3

- 2 And Paul entered, as he usually did, and for three Sabbaths he reasoned and argued with them from the Scriptures,
3 Explaining [them] and [quoting passages] setting forth and proving that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, Whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ, the Messiah."

Let us begin with who these people thought 'Christ' was. You should know that in the mind of the First Century Jew as well as the Greeks who were considered proselytes, converts, the word 'Christ' did not connect with Jesus automatically like it does with us. We stand at the end of 2000 years of history in which Jesus has been called 'Christ' so that the two names are synonymous for us. You should know that the word 'Christ' in the Greek language was a replacement for the word 'Messiah' in the Hebrew.

The Jews had, from earliest times, believed in a coming Savior, a descendant of David, who would come on the scene and do wonderful things. Depending on their view of scripture and history, those wonderful things were varied. Connecting their expectations of the Messiah with Jesus of Nazareth was the task of the apostles but another challenge they had was dispelling the false notions of 'Christ,' the Messiah, out of the minds of those who had absorbed and wrong view of Him.

When Abraham had been called from the land of the Chaldeans, he had been promised that one of His descendants, one single individual called his 'seed' would bring blessing upon the entire world. When Abraham's grandson, Jacob (also called Israel), was nearing death he called his 12 sons together and had a word for them all. Here is the word he spoke to Judah, who was the father of the tribe to which Jesus would be born.

Gen 49:10

- 10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. KJV

Gen 49:10

- 10 " The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. NASU

Gen 49:10

- 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he comes to whom it belongs;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. RSV

The 'scepter,' of course, was the symbol carried by a king to show that he was the king. This 'Shiloh' was understood to be the same person as the 'Seed' promised to Abraham.

David spoke of a person whom he called 'My Lord' to whom the God of Heaven gave a declaration and a promise.

Ps 110:1-4

- 1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.
2 The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.
3 Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.
4 The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. KJV

This is the same person, both a king and a priest, the 'Lord' of David who was the mightiest king of his time.

And Isaiah spoke of one called 'Emmanuel,' 'God with us.'

Isa 7:14

- 14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. KJV

This Person, this Messiah, was to the Jews a grand and mysterious figure who would appear on the scene and make all things right.

Except for those who had believed on Jesus, Messiah, Christ, was a future figure wrapped in many prophecies and variously understood among them, but they all thought of Him as one who would have God with Him in might and in power.

For the most part the Jews thought of Him as One Who would burst upon the scene, rid Israel of her oppressors, and lead the nation to splendor greater than they had ever known even under David and Solomon.

You will recall that on at least one occasion the Jews sought to take Jesus and make Him King, assuming this was the role of the Messiah.

John 6:14-15

- 14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a

- truth that prophet that should come into the world.
- 15 When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. KJV

On another occasion, they sang His praises as their King come to deliver them.

Luke 19:37-38

- 37 And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen;
- 38 Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. KJV

This was the primary way that the Jews of the First Century thought of this legendary Person Who was coming to be their Messiah, their Christ. And, at least for a short time, this is how some of the disciples of Jesus saw Him.

There was another view of the Messiah in Israel that is not so well known. This was revealed when Jesus was brought to the temple for circumcision when He was eight days old.

There were two old and godly people who happened, by the Providence of God, to be in the temple that day and both of them acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah.

Luke 2:25-38

- 25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.
- 26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. [*Messiah*]
- 27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,
- 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,
- 29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
- 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
- 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
- 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.
- 33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.
- 34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
- 35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.
- 36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;
- 37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from

- the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.
- 38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. KJV

There was also in Israel a group of people with an expectation of the coming Messiah, but one that was very different from those who were looking for a great earthly king. Simeon and Anna were representative of a large group, "all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

Simeon's words reveal some important things that those people were expecting:

spiritual redemption, the salvation of the people

one to bring God's revelation [light] to the Gentiles and glory upon 'thy people Israel'

but he also had some hard things to say, some expectations of the Messiah that were not all grand:

Luke 2:34-35

- 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,
- 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (from New International Version)

He would cause "falling and rising" to many Jews

He would be spoken against

He would reveal the [wicked] thoughts of many hearts

There would be terrible suffering caused to Mary because of Him.

Simeon's thoughts were consistent with the vision of Isaiah as he saw the suffering Servant Who would bring redemption to His people.

Isa 53:2-11

- 2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.
- 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- 4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
- 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.
- 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.
- 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of

- my people was he stricken.
- 9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.
- 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
- 11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. KJV

Paul argued that the Messiah, whom many of these Jews were expecting as a coming conqueror, would need to suffer unto death and then rise again. In fact, he argued that Messiah 'must' suffer.

But why 'must' Messiah, the 'Christ,' suffer? Look at v.11, because God was dissatisfied with man as he was naturally. And why was God dissatisfied? Look at the work of the Messiah, v.4,5, because of our sins.

In Rom 3:10-19 Paul quoted many OT passages to demonstrate that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and this produced a great dissatisfaction in God with the human race, a dissatisfaction so profound and terrible that He had declared, "the soul that sinneth it shall die." [Ezek 18:4,20].

The only remedy was for God Himself to provide a solution for the problem. The problem cannot be solved unless One in Whom there is no sin at all takes the penalty upon Himself for those who are guilty and cannot pay their debt. But it could never be known to humanity that the One had successfully done that unless He rose from the dead to prove to us that the Work had been successful.

Thus, Paul's message.

- 3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Had these Jews heard of Jesus? It is almost impossible to believe that they had not. It has been almost 20 years since His crucifixion. They, no doubt, had heard all of the stories of His miracles as well as His death and [supposed] resurrection, which they would have seriously doubted. But now here stands one in their own synagogue who claims to have seen Him and to have been called by Him, affirming that this one who had been executed in Jerusalem was the Messiah upon whom all of their nation going back to Abraham had believed on and looked for.

The evidence was convincing to some of the Jews and many of the Greeks.

Is it convincing for you?

How about the reality that it was necessary for the Son of God to suffer, die, and rise again because God Himself was dissatisfied with you?

What have you done with that truth? Embraced it? Repented of your sins? Believed on Him?
Or is God still dissatisfied?